

## MEMORANDUM

## NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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April 28, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR: MR. KISSINGER

FROM: JOHN HOLDRIDGE *JHO*

SUBJECT: Impact of NVA Offensive on Pacification

CIA has prepared a preliminary damage assessment of the Pacification Program in South Vietnam (Tab B) which makes the point that so far the NVA offensive has not been as disruptive to pacification as the Tet attacks of 1968. According to the report, this is due to the fact that the big-unit battles in the current offensive have been fought in the remote border regions, well away from population concentrations. Also, unlike Tet 1968, the local Viet Cong forces have been replaced by North Vietnamese regulars.

The study also stresses the hazards inherent in drawing early conclusions about pacification damage by pointing out that after the Tet offensive of 1968, Saigon was able to extend its influence beyond what it had been before, even though it had largely abandoned the countryside at the outset.

The report does indicate, however, that the Communists have caused significant damage to pacification in Quang Tri Province, along the coast from Quang Nam to Binh Dinh provinces, in Binh Long Province and in the Mekong Delta. Following is a summary of the report's damage assessment for each of these areas:

The Northern and Central Provinces

While the North Vietnamese have seized half of the province of Quang Tri and are claiming to have set up "liberation governments," most of the people have fled south and what the North really controls is a battlefield that is subject to heavy allied bombing and shelling.

The Communists have done considerably better in the coastal lowlands from Quang Nam to Binh Dinh in terms of population control. Sympathy for the enemy has historically been strong in this area and the enemy has been

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successful in overrunning at least one district capital, surrounding several others and cutting the north-south highway, Route 1, in several places. At least part of their success is due to the fact that many ARVN units have been shifted to the battlefields in the central highlands and in northern I Corps.

North of Saigon

The North Vietnamese have seized control of the northern part of Binh Long Province but as in Quang Tri, much of the population has fled southward. In the area they control, the Communist troops carefully organized the remaining populace, confiscated rice stocks, conscripted for labor details and through secret VC cadre, carried out public executions of some residents who had been in GVN service or were staunch anti-Communists. Meanwhile, local VC cadre and units have been giving urgent instructions to step up harassing actions in the more heavily populated provinces closer to Saigon in coordination with enemy big-unit attacks along the border.

Worry in the Delta

There are ten main-force enemy regiments in the Delta. This fact, plus the departure of the ARVN 21st Division is a source of considerable apprehension to South Vietnamese commanders. Two VC regiments, heavily reinforced with northern troops, are overwhelming GVN forces in Chuong Thien Province and are reportedly extending their influence northward where they could threaten Can Tho City.

Two northern regiments have a direct affect on the situation in the Delta, even though they are in southeastern Cambodia as the South Vietnamese have sent nearly all of the regular forces they normally assign to border defense into Cambodia where they have taken serious losses. The ARVN have prevented some regiments from pushing across the border but have been unable to prevent other northern regiments from slipping into the Delta farther east.

In other parts of the Delta, Communist forces have been carrying out widespread harassing attacks but since the night of 7-8 April, the level of Communist activity has leveled off considerably.

GVN security forces in many populated districts have been hit but the VC in the Delta, while still dangerous, are a much less formidable threat than they were in 1968. As in most other parts of the country, the outcome of the battles between the main-force units of both sides will play a major role in determining who controls the Delta.